 Resource 13 - Understanding ‘The Vesper Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden’

| Poem | The Vesper Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden |
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| Context | The Reverend Samuel Marsden was an historical figure, a religious man who became a magistrate in the 1820s. He was revered in England but became known locally for his cruelty, hypocrisy and materialism. |
| Content | The persona, Marsden, is describing the way he is inflicting punishment on a ‘twice-convicted’ person. He is also explaining his devotion to God and justifies his cruelty through religious allusions to suffering and theocratic views. |
| Purpose | Slessor challenges widely held beliefs and representations of Australian historical figures and events. |
| Structure | Four stanzas with the final stanza being a single line, rhyming couplets. |
| Stylistic Features | Poem has a strong rhythm and rhyming scheme which gives the poem a child-like sing-song beat, making it seem that Marsden is enjoying his pursuits of punishment.  Strong and violent imagery demonstrated through religious allusion and the first person narrative. |

Human Experiences of ‘The Vesper Song of the Reverend Samuel Marsden’

1. What human experiences are explored within the poem?
2. Are these experiences individual or collective?
3. Find evidence to support your observations of one of the human experiences explored in this poem.
4. What impact do these human experiences have on the individual (the imagined victim within the poem)? On the audience?
5. How does the imagery within this poem affect you on a personal level? Provide evidence.
6. Highlight all the violent images. What is the impact of this word choice?
7. Write a paragraph commenting on the title of the poem, what this says about the Reverend Samuel Marsden and Slessor’s purpose in writing this poem.

Use the Rubric to Respond to the Questions

1. Is this an individual or collective experience? What evidence in the poem suggests this?
2. What evidence is there to suggest the persona enjoys his power?
3. What emotions are being captured in this poem? Explore the word choice and provide quotes to support your answer
4. Is there any evidence of anomalies? Paradoxes? Inconsistencies?
5. What is the motivation of the persona in dealing out such harsh punishment? What reward does the persona gain?

Responding Personally

1. How do you feel about the persona’s attitude towards violence?
2. Do you agree that the end justify the means?
3. What type of punishment to you think is appropriate for breaking rules?
4. Why does he call himself a ‘humble wretch’?
5. Comment on Slessor’s role as a story teller. How effective has he been in capturing this experience?